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Functional Behavior Assessment: Nuts and Bolts



What is Behavior?

“... a person’s interaction with his or her environment”



When is Behavior a Problem?

When the intensity, frequency or duration of a certain behavior causes problems with that person’s interaction with his or her environment



Listen to the Behaviors



When people communicate via an unusual behavior, sometimes the most appropriate response is to listen carefully to what they are "saying" & change the environment accordingly.

Communicating Behaviors



People communicate in the most efficient and effective manner available to them at any given point in time.

Functional Assessment

Classifying and selecting treatments based upon function of problem behavior

ANTECEDENT

"An **antecedent** is any stimulus (event, action, etc.) that precedes subject behavior and which influences its onset."

BEHAVIOR

- Define what you see
 - Example:
Instead of Chris is aggressive; Chris bites, scratches, and pushes.
- Don't hypothesize or speculate

CONSEQUENCE

Contingent event that follows and affects whether the behavior will decrease or increase over time. "Contingent" means there is an "if. . .then" relationship between the behavior and its consequences. There are good consequences and bad consequences.

The ABCs



Exposed to object → Screams → Gets object

BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENT

- Pick one or two behaviors to change
- Identify the behavior
- Identify antecedent
- Identify consequences that maintain behaviors
- Identify the EO
- Identify functions of the behavior

BEHAVIOR PLANS

- Designed to alter patterns of problem behavior
- The process involves changes in behavior of family, teachers, staff or managers in some settings.
- The treatment is based on making the behaviors irrelevant, inefficient and ineffective.
- The treatment should be based on developing/ increasing replacement and alternative behaviors that will take place of the challenging behaviors.
- Strategies should be based on EOs, Antecedents, Consequences and Functions.

FUNCTIONS OF BEHAVIOR

- When a behavior analyst talks about the function of a behavior, they are talking about the reinforcement that has been maintaining a behavior (or causing a behavior to increase).
- If a behavior is occurring, that means that it is being reinforced in some way.

Functions and Strategies

FUNCTIONS	WHAT TO DO (STRATEGIES)
To Obtain Attention	Ignore
To Obtain Internal Stimulation	Make changes to environment
To Obtain Activities/ Objects	Do not provide access to activities and/or objects
Escape/Avoid Attention	Reinforce appropriate ways of communicating " give me a break"
Escape/Avoid tasks and/or activities	Provide break in between activities

WHAT IS REINFORCEMENT?

- Reinforcement occurs when a consequence to a behavior results in an increase in the likelihood of the behavior occurring again in the future under similar circumstances.
- Reinforcement strengthens any behavior – either appropriate or inappropriate – and it is not dependent on someone.
- Reinforcement occurs all the time and is one way we all learn new behavior.

WHY DO REINFORCERS WORK

- Reinforcers affect the behavior that immediately precedes them.
- Reinforcement must be provided as quickly as possible following a desired behavior – waiting too long will reduce the effectiveness of the reinforcer, and increase the possibility that some other (possibly undesired) behavior will be reinforced.

Schedules of Reinforcement

- Schedules of reinforcement refers to the rule denoting how many or which specific responses will be reinforced.
- Reinforcers are always administered according to some schedule.
- The schedule makes a difference in how effective the reinforcement program will be.

TYPES OF REINFORCEMENT

- Continuous reinforcement – the simplest type of reinforcement where a response is reinforced each time it occurs
- For example, to train a child to follow instructions, reinforcement is given each time the child responds appropriately.

TYPES OF REINFORCEMENT

- Intermittent reinforcement – reinforcement may be delivered after only some of the appropriate responses.
- For example, putting money into a slot machine where the response is reinforced after some varied number of responses.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CONTINUOUS AND INTERMITTENT REINFORCEMENT

- During the acquisition or reinforcement phase, a behavior developed with continuous reinforcement is performed at a higher rate than is a behavior developed with intermittent reinforcement.
- While a behavior is being developed, continuous reinforcement schedules should be used. The advantage of continuous reinforcement is that performance occurs at a high level while behavior is reinforced.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CONTINUOUS AND INTERMITTENT REINFORCEMENT

- However, the advantage of continuous reinforcement is compensated after the power of the reinforcer ceases.
- Behaviors that were continuously reinforced diminish or extinguish more rapidly than do behaviors that were intermittently reinforced.
- The advantage of intermittent reinforcement is that resistance to extinction is greater when reinforcement is variable.

ADVANTAGES OF BOTH CONTINUOUS AND INTERMITTENT SCHEDULES OF REINFORCEMENT

- Both advantages can be obtained by developing behavior with continuous reinforcement until a high rate of behavior has been well established. To foster response maintenance, changing the schedule to intermittent reinforcement and making it increasingly intermittent.

DETERMINING REINFORCERS

- In order to use the principle of reinforcement effectively, you must have an idea of what is reinforcing for the child.
- Think about the child's preferences: edibles, praise, physical reinforcements
- What does the child tell you he wants?
- Develop a list of interests/reinforcements

DEVELOPING A LIST OF REINFORCERS

- List out all the features of some favorite items or toys and explore other items with those similar features.
- For example, the child may like watching football games. Perhaps he would like football jerseys or football figures or football video games.
- Be creative and don't be afraid to try new things even if they seem silly.

DEVELOPING A LIST OF REINFORCERS

- Remember, a reinforcer is meant to increase behavior. If the child is not responding to the item, it may not be a reinforcer.
- For example, if you give a child a cookie but he tosses it on the floor, it is likely that the cookie is no longer reinforcing. However, if the child eats the cookie, then reaches for another, the cookie, at this time, is a preferred reinforcer.

MOTIVATION

- To effectively use reinforcement, one must be able to identify what is motivating at that moment for that child.
- Learning will not occur if the child is not interested.

STRATEGIES FOR THE POST INSTITUTIONALIZED CHILD

- The child needs clear and concise directions, rules, and consequences. Instructions/directions must be presented to him in sentences no longer than 4-5 words. For example, "_____, pick up your shoes". Try to eliminate emotions and lectures. He might miss the meaning of a sentence if it is too long or too complicated to organize and process. Give consequences, good and bad, to his behaviors. This will increase wanted behaviors and decrease unwanted ones.
- Maintain an environment free of extra stimuli that can over stimulate the child. Make sure to keep objects, items, toys stored in a place where they won't be over stimulating for the child. He should follow the rule: "one in, one out" (put away one toy before getting the second one).
- Do not try to use logic, reasoning or try to convince the child of what he needs to do. Use "Clear directions without negotiation". If he gets aggressive use a Sequence One hold immediately.

Use social skills training:

- Define the skill (e.g., Follow directions, Use your words, Use self-control, etc.)
- Model the skill
- Role-Play
- Parent rehearses with the child (puppets can be used during this step)
- Peer rehearses with the child monitored by parent (puppets can be used during this step)
- Reinforce skill

- Use social stories. This strategy is designed to describe social situations in terms of relevant social cues and define appropriate responses. It will help the child understand situations and teach him how to respond appropriately to them. Examples of skills that should be taught through social stories are: Following directions; Use self-control, etc. Social stories should be short, concise and reviewed daily/weekly in order to be effective.
- Use catchy phrases, gestures, and signs when giving directions to the child. For example, "Stop, Listen, Think, Make Good Choices" to help decrease impulsivity. These phrases should be practiced like children practice the phrase: "Stop, Drop, and Roll" in case of fire. The child's parents and teachers should reinforce/practice it constantly to help him retrieve it when he needs it. Other phrases that the child should use are:
 - "When you get the feeling...GO!!!
 - "In this house we don't whine, we talk"

- Procedures for 3-Step Guided Compliance
Three-step guided compliance should be used to address noncompliant behaviors. This procedure involves using **least to most prompting**. First, the child is given a verbal prompt (i.e., "Go sit down"). If he doesn't initiate the task within 10-15 seconds, a gestural prompt plus a verbal prompt is given (i.e., "Go sit down" + pointing in the direction of the chair or carpet square). If the task is not initiated within 10-15 seconds, a verbal prompt and the least amount of physical guidance is used to have the child comply with the task.

The goal of using this procedure is to **teach/train the child to respond before the physical guidance**. Over time it will be clear to the child that he will be required to do the task and may decide to cooperate on his own. It is important to know that the child should not be praised when he completes the task after using the three-step guided compliance. He is not "doing a good job", the adult is guiding him to do what he was requested to do and had refused to do in the first place. The child should be praised when he is complying with adult's directions using a verbal or visual prompt.

- The child needs a structured environment. A daily schedule or sequence of events should be used to increase predictability of tasks and activities, and increase structure at home. When creating a schedule, the activities should be arranged to have a preferred activity at the beginning and at the end with a non-preferred activity in between. This should help in making the activities more appealing to the child and might decrease the behaviors of concern. A reinforcer or break (depending on needs) is recommended at the end of 2-3 activities. Also, use visuals/ pictures to "connect" the child to the schedule.

- Use the book Navigating the Social World, by Janette McAfee as a curriculum to develop social skills. The child can benefit from the emotions thermometer and the description of different levels of emotions that are included in this book.
- Do not remove demands or tasks when the child expresses himself using unwanted behaviors. Ignore and redirect to task at hand when he uses other unwanted behaviors, after a demand has been placed. The removal of these demands immediately after the challenging behavior occurs makes the behavior stronger. In order to put the challenging behavior in extinction, we can't remove the demand immediately after the behaviors occur. We also need to teach him new behaviors to express himself in a less disruptive manner. This can be done by using social stories and other social skills training techniques.

Create Rules (Use Pictures):

- Keep hands to yourself, unless you are hugging your family.
- **STOP!! LISTEN!!! THINK!!!! MAKE GOOD CHOICES!!!** Pick up your toy , before you get another toy.
- No whining, use your words .
- Follow directions , do what mom and dad tell you to do immediately.

- A program based on Applied Behavior Analysis/Verbal Behavior is recommended to increase language processing and communication. This is an intensive program to teach language and communication that focuses on teaching receptive language, labels, requests, motor imitation, imitation, and intraverbals. This program also focuses on how to read and express emotions, as well as using and answering "Wh" questions (i.e., Why, When, What, How, Which, Who, etc.). The family must work with a consultant that can design and supervise the program.
- Increase word processing and retrieval using the following technique. Say a sentence: "The house has windows". Then say the sentence with a blank: "The house has a _____"; then say the same sentence with two blanks: "The house has _____"; then, "The house _____"; then, "The _____". This will increase the process of word retrieval without using prompts (i.e., what does the house have, tell me what does the house have, etc.). The use/abuse of prompts can make him prompt dependent in the future.